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Chiengmai and the Inception of an Administrative Centralization Policy in Siam (I)*

by

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Of all Asian countries in the nineteenth century, Thailand provides one of the most interesting, instructive, and yet still neglected examples of the interaction of very different cultures and ideas, Oriental with Western. All sorts of questions arise as to how, when all the countries around it were falling under what at first seemed like the blanket of Western rule, 'Siam', as it was then known, managed to come to terms with the West, thereby maintaining both its independence and cultural identity. This is an attempt to answer some of these questions with reference to the crucial field of government.

A sudden relative wealth of historical research has erupted in recent years, concerned with Siam in this remarkable period. Much of it has been inspired by the pioneering work amongst Thai language materials, both published and documentary, of W. F. Vella,¹⁾ Neon Snidvongs,²⁾ and D. K. Wyatt.³⁾ A wide variety of topics have now been attacked, most of them already complete, though some still in progress. The theses of Busakorn Lailert on the internal affairs of the mainly eighteenth century Ban Phlu Luang dynasty,⁴⁾ and Akin Rabibhadana on Thai society under the succeeding Bangkok Chakri dynasty up to 1873,⁵⁾ provide detailed explanations of the character of traditional government in Siam. For the nineteenth century specifically, there are two base works written from the Bangkok point of view; firstly, Constance Wilson's thesis on the reign of King Mongkut,⁶⁾ which is

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1) W. F. Vella, *The Impact of the West on Government in Thailand*. 1955.

2) Neon Snidvongs, *Siam under Rama III*. 1957.

3) D. K. Wyatt, *The Politics of Reform in Thailand*. 1969.

4) Busakorn Lailert, *The Ban Phlu Luang Dynasty, 1688-1767*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London,

1972.

5) Akin Rabibhadana, *The Organization of Thai Society in the Early Bangkok Period, 1782-1873*. Cornell Data Paper, 1969.

6) C. M. Wilson, *State and Society in the Reign of Mongkut, 1851-68*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Cornell, 1970.

portrayed as, in general, a rather static period, with Siam responding only where necessary to the Western impact which really only began in that reign and remained quite limited to its end; and secondly, Tej Bunnag's on the highly dynamic role of Prince Damrong at King Chulalongkorn's new Interior Ministry, 1892-1915,⁷⁾ perhaps the real climax of the Siamese response before the 1932 return to a relatively passive bureaucratic system as demonstrated by Siffin.⁸⁾

Additionally, we have various accounts concerned with what are, or were once, regional points of view; Sharom bin Ahmat has written on one ex-dependency, Kedah, and its relations with Bangkok,⁹⁾ and David Chandler has given us a preview on another, Cambodia.¹⁰⁾ Kennon Breazeale is at work on Northeast Thailand affairs, while my own thesis on Northern Thailand, or 'Western Laos', up to 1892,¹¹⁾ has been followed by Ansil Ramsay's, primarily concerned with Damrong's innovations as they affected the same area post-1892.¹²⁾

In terms of the 'modernization' of Siam, and the maintenance of its independence, various different periods have been seen as the most critical, with each historian naturally influenced in his choice by the topic he chose to deal with. To my mind, the mid-1880's claim that role, as I assert below, but I would nevertheless like to acknowledge here how much I have gained in breadth of perspective, and also understanding of the specific role of Chiangmai in modern Thai history, both from the above writers and many others.

For my work on Western Laos, two extreme approaches might have been possible, following the division indicated above; that concentrating on the local point of view, of an historic political entity in the process of submergence within the expanding 'modern' Thailand; or alternatively, as a mere exemplary object of developing Bangkok 'control' policies. From the start, it seemed to me that the most valid approach so far as Chiangmai was concerned lay somewhere in between, both in terms of its own ultimate fate, and the broader, Thailand viewpoint. The purely local approach would have appeared a mere exercise in sentiment, with by no means the same validity as with Kedah and Cambodia, which each ultimately escaped the Siamese tentacles, and maintain today a separate political identity. Practical problems also presented themselves, particularly the lack of a clear terminal date, short of 1932, or possibly 1915.

7) Tej Bunnag, *The Provincial Administration of Siam from 1892-1915*. Unpublished D.Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1968.

8) W. J. Siffin, *The Thai Bureaucracy: Institutional Change and Development*. 1966.

9) S. bin Ahmat, *Tradition and Change in a Malay State: The Economic and Political Development of Kedah, 1879-1923*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London, 1969.

117. cf. also R. Bonney's specifically Malay-oriented *Kedah, 1771-1821*. 1971.

10) D. Chandler, "Cambodia's Relations with Siam in the Early Bangkok Period: The Politics of a Tributary State," *JSS* 60, pt. 1, 153-169.

11) N. J. Brailey, *The Origins of the Siamese Forward Movement in Western Laos, 1850-92*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London, 1969.

12) A. Ramsay, *The Development of a Bureaucratic Polity; The Case of Northern Siam*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Cornell, 1971.

With regard to the other extreme, what follows should serve to emphasize that in 1850, even 1870, Chiengmai was itself still very clearly a distinct political entity, and by the latter date was also demonstrably Bangkok's most important tributary, or dependent state, following the French establishment of a protectorate over Cambodia. Because of this, at least up until 1885, it appears to have been the chief object of the developing Siamese administrative centralization policy, and therefore largely responsible for its character. Even up until 1890, it would appear to have been of as much concern to Bangkok as any of the outer dependencies, and thus worthy of being the focus of study in this context. But subsequently, a combination of both internal factors and external problems, often interconnected, caused greater emphasis to be placed by Bangkok in turn on other outer dependencies, and then the heartland of Siam Proper. The initiative in Chiengmai and the rest of Western Laos almost died, and when, towards the end of the 1890's, it was revived, it seems to have been inspired chiefly by a desire to achieve uniformity, to extend an already almost perfected system to one of the last remaining exceptions. It is, therefore, during the period 1850-1890 that the Bangkok-Chiengmai relationship is of most interest with regard to the shaping of policy in the Siamese capital.

The first characteristic of the Bangkok-Chiengmai relationship pre-1850 worthy of note, is that it can hardly be described as historic or traditional. In fact, it dated back only as far as 1774,¹³⁾ and was therefore a creation of the Thonburi-Bangkok period, whereas all other regions of modern Thailand date their connection well back into Ayuthya times (mid-fourteenth to mid-eighteenth centuries). The other areas which were the object of contemporary Siamese ambitions, Eastern Laos and Cambodia, became again separated for the most part subsequently.

Moreover, the nature of the relationship's inception is important, not least because it is so often misrepresented, but also because it explains much about the relationship that ensued. It is, indeed, a commonplace to find in modern Bangkok Thai histories brief references to the Siamese 'conquest' of Western Laos in 1774,¹⁴⁾ following which the area only receives mention when its affairs directly affect the interests of the Siamese capital, as if it had at once been converted into an integral part of Siam.

A very different picture emerges from Siamese chronicle-histories compiled before the First World War.¹⁵⁾ In 1774, a period of Burmese rule had just attained a decade.

13) Prachakitkorachak, Phraya (Chem Bunnag), *Phongsawadan Yonok*. Bangkok, 1961. 477.

14) For instance, Prince Chula Chakrabongse's *Lords of Life*. 1960. 74, or Prayun Phitsanukha, *Somdet Phrachao Taksin Maharat*. Bangkok, 1970. II, 9-31, which, even though a much more detailed account, still gives the same impression. M.L. Manich Chumsai's *History of Laos (including the history of Lannathai, Chiengmai)*. Bangkok, 1967, simply ignores the region after 1567.

On the other hand, Sangiem Khum-phawat, *Rachapradiphat nai Somdet Phra Piya Maharat* (Royal Unions in the Reign of the Greatly Beloved King). Bangkok, 1969. 522-3, provides a quite realistic assessment of the 'vacillating' Western Lao attitude towards Bangkok.

15) In their modern editions: Prachakitkorachak, *op.cit.*, 473-9; Maha Ammat, Phraya (Run Sipen), *Phongsawadan Chiengmai, Lampang, Lamphunchai* in *Prachum Phongsawadan*, III. Bangkok, 1963. 88. cf. also: C. Notton, *Chronique de Chiengmai*. 1932. 199-200.

All the various towns in the region had been captured back in the early 1760's to serve as advance bases for the invasion of Ayuthya, and had in addition to supply local levies as support forces. When, however, the Chinese invasions of Burma of 1766–69 forced Burmese withdrawal from prostrate Siam, sizeable detachments nevertheless remained in Western Laos ready for a renewal of the invasion in due course. And while Western Lao dependence on Burma was by no means unprecedented; it had been the rule indeed for most of the preceding two centuries; a continuing Burmese presence on this scale, and the amount of political interference with the local authorities that it represented, seemingly was. Taksin, the King reviving Siam from his Thonburi capital, perhaps recalled the despairing call for help to Ayuthya from the small Western Lao state of Lamphun back in 1763,¹⁶⁾ but in 1771 he met with no local response as he marched north, and his attack on the Burmese at Chiangmai that year was a failure. It was only in 1774 when, finally, the Lao nobility of Chiangmai and its neighbour, Lampang, decided that Burmese rule had become intolerable, and staged a plot that ended with the gates of the two towns being opened to Siamese troops, that a regular relationship was initiated on a basis of mutual interest.

Nor would it be wise to view the agreement of 1774 and the mutual interests it enshrined simply against the events of the previous decade. In this context, the whole specific Northern Thai tradition is relevant, above all the concept of 'Lannathai'. The latter, as a kingdom, was founded at Chiangmai in 1296 by King Mangrai, at times extended even beyond Western Laos¹⁷⁾ into the Shan States of modern Burma, and stood heir to the even older Hariphunchai tradition of the Mon people, with whom then, for nearly three centuries, the immigrant Thai worked their own particular cultural mix. The last of these three centuries saw almost incessant warfare with Lannathai's younger, and ostensibly stronger lowland rival to the south, Ayuthya, based on the Chaophraya valley. Much devastation was undoubtedly caused, but it was not to Ayuthya that Lannathai ultimately succumbed, in 1556, but to the Burmese again, and their exhausting struggle probably contributed to Ayuthya's collapse in turn, thirteen years later, to the all-conquering Burmese ruler, Bayinnaung.¹⁸⁾

But again, no long-term community of experience stemmed from this momentary parallel fate. After little more than a decade, Ayuthya resumed its political independence, while Chiangmai and the rest of former Lannathai remained, except for brief intervals, within the Burmese sphere. Burmese cultural influence probably went into decline when actual Burmese political rule was succeeded by local Lao leadership in the early seventeenth century, but the various Lao successor states to Lannathai continued to pay regular tribute to the

16) Boromanuchit Chinorot, Krom Phra, *Phra-rachaphongsawadan Krung Si Ayuthya*. Bangkok, 1961. II, 267.

17) 'Western Laos', a term in common nineteenth century Siamese use, is here taken to signify the mountainous region of Northern Thailand dissected by the valleys of the Ping, Wang, Yom and Nan, principal tributaries to the Chaophraya river, plus the Chiengrai-Chiengsen plain draining into the Mekhong river. Each of the valleys was dominated by one town; the Wang by Lampang, Yom by Phre, Nan by the town of Nan, except the Ping, shared between Chiangmai and the much smaller Lamphun.

18) W. A. R. Wood, *History of Siam*. 1959. Chapters 4–8.

Burmese court along with a host of other Burmese dependencies westwards to the edge of the Irrawaddy valley. When offered the alternative of joining Ayuthya in the early 1660's, in the course of a Burmo-Siamese war, the Chiangmai rulers declined the opportunity, and the preliminary eighteenth century break with Burma, in 1727, came about at a time of at least relative weakness simultaneously in both Burma and Siam.¹⁹⁾

As a result of their different historical experiences by the eighteenth century, the Western Lao or 'Thai Yuan' and the Siamese still spoke mutually unintelligible dialects of Thai, and wrote them in mutually unintelligible scripts. In terms of customs, the Siamese subsisted on non-glutinous rice, the Lao on 'sticky' or glutinous rice, Siamese women, hair *en brosse*, dressed in the *phanung*, or divided skirt, their long-haired Lao sisters in the full-skirted *phasin*, and amongst the elite class at least, enjoyed some surviving matrilineal traditions. The separate monastic hierarchies in each Lao state administered a monkhood displaying much greater Mahayanist Buddhist doctrinal influences than its Siamese counterpart,²⁰⁾ and the respective monastic building styles demonstrated above all the contrary cultural links; Siam with Cambodia, Western Laos with the Shan States and Burma.

But the Lao had a strategic problem. Ideally, as in their last shortlived period of independence, 1727-63, they would have preferred to settle their own affairs. But they no longer had any claim to major power status, even by South East Asian standards. Lack of access to the sea, and limited agricultural land much segmented by mountains prevented further population growth and contributed to local feuds. As for Burmese and Siamese weakness, and the existence of a friendly 'Mon' state at the mouth of the Salween river in the 1740's and 1750's, these were exceptional circumstances. The Western Lao could not normally hope even to operate the 'two-headed bird' or 'lord of two skies' role, common among the Mekhong valley states, of paying tribute simultaneously to their greater neighbours; Burmo-Siamese irreconcilability was consistently just too pronounced for this sort of accommodation occasionally accepted by Siam and Vietnam. Often, in face of overwhelming force, usually Burmese, no real choice of suzerain was offered. But when a real choice was possible, what the events mentioned above do seem to indicate, very interestingly, is that the Lao preferred the weaker party, again also normally Burma, for the sake of the internal autonomy allowed them. For the same reason in 1773-4, at a time of effectively direct Burmese rule, they chose to invite the Siamese in.

Two aspects must be considered briefly with reference to the Lao-Siamese relationship that followed; the nature of traditional Siamese policy towards tributary states, and the much broader one of general international relations in pre-modern South East Asia, both of which have lacked any extensive general study hitherto. So far as the latter is concerned, a tendency has developed recently, it seems, to view tributary relationships in the area as

19) Notton, *op.cit.*, 171-181.

20) Anuman Rajadon, Phraya, *Essays on Thai Folklore*, 1968. 24.

a whole, if not as smaller-scale versions of the Chinese tributary system, at least as derived largely from the Chinese example.²¹⁾ In the first place, this has dangerous contemporary implications, bestowing historical authenticity on Chinese claims to pre-eminence in South East Asia by suggesting they involved onetime rights, for instance in Bangkok, comparable with those that Bangkok enjoyed in Chiangmai.

But such a view is also erroneous. As Max Weber maintains,²²⁾ tributary-style relationships of political dependence were characteristic of the patrimonial regimes so common throughout Asia, and it would have been strange indeed if South East Asian states had not conformed in some fashion. Certainly the Chinese system would appear to have possessed a uniqueness in its elaboration and consistency when at its peak, *vis-a-vis* the Siamese for instance, which was largely personal and non-bureaucratic,²³⁾ but this it did not reach until the fifteenth century, under the Ming dynasty. The maritime South East Asian states, as Professor Wolters has shown,²⁴⁾ had much earlier discovered the value of the south Chinese markets for their produce, and paid irregular lipservice to the tributary system as it then existed, mainly for the sake of the nominal equality it implied in their relations with each other. But for the larger, agriculture-based states of Java and the Indo-Chinese peninsula, their huge neighbour mattered little until the thirteenth century advent of the China-based Mongols. It was only then, as a result of invasions of Yunnan, Burma, Champa and Java, as well as Vietnam, accompanied by the seizure of political power by Thai immigrants over much of modern Thailand and Burma, that South East Asia outside the Red River valley recognized what could be thrown at it from the north. And it was this realization that brought these states in spirit for the first time into the East Asian world.²⁵⁾

Yunnan, in fact, was to remain an integral part of China, leaving the door open for new attacks, and though the Mongols were repulsed on all other fronts by the end of the thirteenth century, the succeeding Ming in their crisis of credibility demonstrated by Professor Wang Gungwu,²⁶⁾ were to feel obliged to revive this expansionist policy in the early fifteenth. That the Ming Emperor Yung-lo should even initially have despatched his vast war fleets to South East Asian waters merely from commercial as opposed to prestige motives²⁷⁾ seems hardly convincing when one remembers the Mongol Pamelayu precedent,²⁸⁾ and his contemporary warlike activities both in Central Asia and Vietnam. The naval expeditions, lasting till 1435, were indeed his only real success, effectively, if briefly overawing into true

21) e.g. D. Chandler, *op. cit.*, 153.

22) M. Weber, *Economy and Society*. 1968. III, 1051-2.

23) N. Jacobs, *Modernization without Development: Thailand, an Asian Case Study*. 1971. 27.

24) O. W. Wolters, *Early Indonesian Commerce*. 1967. 167.

25) G. Coedes, *The Making of South East Asia*. 1966. Chapter IV.

26) Wang Gungwu, 'Early Ming relations with Southeast Asia: a background essay,' in J. K. Fairbank ed., *The Chinese World Order*. 1968. 34-62.

27) As claimed principally by J. J. L. Duyvendak, 'The true dates of Chinese maritime expeditions in the early fifteenth century.' *T'oung Pao*, XXXIV (1938), 341-412.

28) A maritime expedition launched in vain against the Majapahit Javanese state in 1292.

submission rulers as far away as East Africa. On land, however, the Chinese armies were thrown out of Vietnam by 1427, and then had to face a Mongol revival during the 1440's which culminated in 1449 in the capture of Yung-lo's imperial successor himself. Ming military prestige can never have been the same thereafter, and that it was now that the tributary system as it affected South East Asia was finally perfected, indicates its true validity. The theme that inspired it, *te*, the Emperor's supposed ineffable, incomparable excellence that drew in emissaries from all sides to honour him, had been conceived originally in a time of even greater weakness, the fifth and sixth centuries, and had consoled the Sung rulers in the twelfth and thirteenth when themselves paying tribute to Mongoloid peoples in Central Asia. The system had been regularized indeed by the Mongols, when they obtained promises of triennial tribute as they withdrew in disorder from countries such as Vietnam and Champa in the 1290's. And finally, it became again both cultural compensation and face-saver for the Ming, and a veil behind which Sino-South East Asian trade reached hitherto unprecedented proportions.²⁹⁾

Thus, even in its theoretical sense, the Chinese tributary system was an empty sham, though it was to survive through to the mid-nineteenth century with those South East Asian rulers most interested in trade often attempting to send missions at more than the prescribed triennial intervals.³⁰⁾ But there was much more to the failure of the system to repeat itself in South East Asia than local perception of its lack of meaning. It was simply not a system suitable for export, as the Vietnamese, the only people to attempt to employ it, proved. It was a universal, exclusive system, which had to be unique. Its duplication by the Vietnamese within South East Asia produced all sorts of problems of identity over and above those within their highly sinicized society. They had at once, willy-nilly, to admit of the ideological 'Elder Brother' status of the Chinese Emperor, but also suffered acute embarrassment when Peking graded certain other South East Asian states as tributaries senior to Vietnam, including some claimed by Vietnam as its own tributaries!³¹⁾

And besides, most of South East Asia had a much more suitable alternative model, that of India. Political terminology in all major South East Asian languages except Vietnamese and Tagalog, testifies, as in so many other fields of culture, to the dominating influence of

29) J. K. Fairbank & Ssu-yu Teng, "On the Ch'ing Tributary System," in *HJAS* (Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies) 6, 2: 135-246.

30) V. Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*. 1966. 95-6, quoting the early nineteenth century British emissary, John Crawfurd, on the Sino-Siamese relationship: "...that the vessels which carry the ambassadors may, under pretext of doing so, be exempted from the payment of imposts. With this view two of the largest descriptions of junks, amounting to nearly one thousand tons each, sail annually from Bangkok to Canton loaded with merchandize. They carry ambassadors annually to the Vice Roy of Canton and, once in three years, these ambassadors go to Peking...They carry the Chinese Emperor a golden flower in token of tribute, but receive in return gifts of a far greater value. The vanity of one court and the rapacity of the other have long rendered this course a permanent one." There were also occasional, vain attempts by the Manchus to intervene militarily—in Burma, 1662, and again in 1766-69, and in Vietnam, 1788, but these represented nothing comparable with the Mongols or Ming.

31) A. B. Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*. 1971. 235-243.

India. And that this influence has survived to the present day indicates, no doubt, that Indian political theory bore a much greater relevance than its Chinese counterpart for South East Asian rulers; that the experiences and situation of the multiplicity of mediaeval Indian states had much more in common with those of South East Asia than the great, unitary Chinese Empire, even when the latter occasionally split three or four ways. Admittedly, Indian political theory included the concept of the *chakravartin*, the 'universal ruler', but even the great Mauryan Guptas had failed to establish the precedent of uniting all India, and thus the concept had not necessarily to be restricted to any one Indian state, or even the Indian sub-continent. Like many Indian rulers, the sixteenth century Burmese king, Tabinshwehti, aspired to the role as a justification for his ambitions of conquest.³²⁾

But in practical terms also, the Indian model meant something very different from the role of the Chinese Emperor. The extension of political authority could certainly be achieved by force or any other means; cynical expediency was the hall-mark of mediaeval Indian *realpolitik* apparently; but success was not then to be expressed in annexation, bureaucratic centralization, and forcible acculturation.³³⁾ The Indian answer was a median way, between the extremes of the reality of the Chinese tributary system on the one hand, and Chinese ideal policy as applied where no effective obstacles stood in the way, on the other. In India, wherever possible, defeated rulers, and especially those who offered homage voluntarily rather than risk defeat, were to be left in possession of their principalities on condition of paying tribute, providing levies in time of war, and other lesser duties. Even first-rank Indian rulers continued to depend primarily on their own base locality for their strength, and Indian political theory thus reflected their failure to establish a tradition of any more than this.

From the South East Asian point of view, such theory was particularly appropriate. States were sparsely populated, and demarcated by much clearer and more formidable natural frontiers, mountain or sea, so that it provided a conceptualization and justification of both the ruler's authority within the island or river-valley base area, and his occasional, and generally vain attempts to combat geography and expand outside. One early state, the great Khmer Empire of Cambodia, Angkor, enjoyed the opportunity to expand into regions barred by no major physical obstacles, and occupied by no real rival political authorities, but its transmission to its successor states, primarily Ayuthya, of some sense of its centralizing aspirations, was accompanied by a knowledge of the limitations of even its success.

What did all this mean for Thailand, and Ayuthya and Chiangmai in particular? For lack of much pre-nineteenth century hard evidence we are on difficult ground. Certainly the geographical and communications factor appears to have been quite as important here as elsewhere in South East Asia. It seems largely to explain the failure of the fifteenth

32) E. Sarkisyanz, *Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution*. 1965. 93.

33) J. W. Spellman, *The Political Thought of Ancient India*. 1964. 146-169.

and sixteenth century attempts of Ayuthya to conquer Chiangmai, although at that stage the latter may well have enjoyed, through greater antiquity as a Thai state, stronger social cohesiveness and political authenticity, while Ayuthya was still principally involved with the absorption and Thaiization of large tracts of ex-Mon and Khmer territory. The latter was a long drawn out process, perhaps nearing effective completion by the end of the sixteenth century in the upsurge of enthusiasm which ejected the Burmese. By this time, probably the whole of the compact Chaophraya plain could be regarded as the Siamese 'heartland', and King Naresuan began, indeed, to look further afield.

But it was more than a century earlier, however, that King Trailokanat had issued his famous Palatine Law (1468).³⁴⁾ This edict listed and classified provinces and claimed dependencies and their duties, to which Siamese lawmakers forever harked back until the nineteenth century, thereby enshrining a political balancing act which had soon lost much of its relevance. Trailok had still been attempting both to placate and strengthen his authority over what had been, until shortly before, important tributary states in the Chaophraya valley itself. At that time, those beyond, at any rate to the north, represented mere aspirations.³⁵⁾ Naresuan's seventeenth century successors, however, might have been expected to build further on the work of their predecessors and Ayuthya's particularly fortunate strategic position, by expanding into the natural buffer regions that surrounded so much of the country's heartland--Western Laos, the whole of the Mekhong valley from Luang Phrabang to Cambodia, the northern Malay states, and even south-east Burma, as yet still primarily Mon and un-Burmanized. Yet so little was done, seemingly, that relations with tributaries, albeit perhaps a topic outside the specific scope, for instance, of Miss Busakorn's thesis,³⁶⁾ do not even force their way in to any extent as might have been expected. Palace struggles, no doubt largely prompted by the lucrateness of the capital city's developing foreign trade, and complications with Western powers were all-preoccupying, to be superseded in the eighteenth century by Vietnamese south-westward expansion into Cambodia, provoking a number of desultory Siamese counter-invasions with little long-term result. Elsewhere, Chiangmai's 1663 rejection of Siamese suzerainty was accepted, Khorat was refortified during the reign of Narai (1657-88),³⁷⁾ but penetration of the plateau beyond was slow, despite the disintegration of the old Vientiane Lanchang kingdom, and mainly by settlement and cultural influence as in the South, where another recent work has emphasized how weak had actual Siamese authority become.³⁸⁾ The Court continued to receive occasional offers of allegiance and the attendant obligations as provided for by the Palatine Law, but successive Siamese kings, for lack of manpower, were simply not in a position

34) H. Q. Quaritch Wales, *Ancient Siamese Government and Administration*. 1965. Chapter V.

35) W. A. R. Wood, *History of Siam*. 1959. 86.

36) Busakorn Lailert, *op. cit.*

37) Manit Vallibhotama, *Guide to Pimai*. 1962. 17-18.

38) A. Teeuw & D. K. Wyatt, *Hikayat Patani*. 1970. I, 21.

to fulfil the implicit corollary duty of protection.³⁹⁾ The dynasty was facing a crisis of authority in Siam Proper even, heralded back in the seventeenth century when the omnibus regional ministries began to emerge as a form of power balance,⁴⁰⁾ while major new disruptive forces were massing on the frontiers.⁴¹⁾ Only in the course of the overturning of all traditional authority right across mainland South East Asia in the middle of the eighteenth century, was the Siamese ruling elite sufficiently transformed and galvanized into mounting a more positive, active border policy.

Thus, a study of previous centuries, while highlighting the general importance of pragmatism and conservatism in Thai political tradition, seems of little help in explaining the exact form that the Bangkok-Chiangmai relationship was now to take. Indeed, a stable peacetime relationship was only to develop after 1810, and the final fading out of the Burmo-Siamese wars. The intervening period served principally to emphasize the buffer role of the Western Lao tributaries, and thereby the imperativeness of allowing the local rulers a great deal of room for initiative. Initially, the opposite extreme of policy was employed by King Taksin, for good enough specifically local reasons; the leading Chiangmai noble who had been recognized as Prince of the town in 1774, experienced difficulty in establishing his authority, and all the more so when a new Burmese attack in 1775 drove him to abandon his capital (--it remained empty for twenty years), and take refuge further south. But Taksin's response, the arrangement through his Minister of the North (*Chakri*), and the latter's brother, Surasih, for a group of Siamese taxation officers to make an inspection tour of the Lao states⁴²⁾ suggests something more, the sort of expansive aspirations that did tend regularly to well up, as we have seen, at times of revival and renewal in Siam. Perhaps Taksin even believed that the recent disasters suffered by the Siamese kingdom had stemmed in large measure from the ineffectiveness of pre-1767 tributary relationships; for example, the failure of those in the south to delay the Burmese advance long, or provide much aid.

Taksin's policy, at any rate, promised disaster. Kawila, the eldest of the seven sons of the Prince of Lampang, and ruling the town in his father's name, drove the King's inspectors from his state by force, and then, like the Prince of Chiangmai, refused for a couple of years to report in person at Thonburi. Ultimately, aware perhaps of the all-conquering progress of the Siamese armies up the Mekhong valley, both did so, and were imprisoned, the Chiangmai Prince dying in captivity. Kawila suffered the humiliating punishment of having his ears slit, but was quite soon freed to return to his state to continue the fight against the Burmese. It is interesting to speculate as to the reason for Taksin's so relenting. Undoubtedly, for lack of local leadership, Western Laos would have lain open for the Burmese

39) Akin Rabibhadana, *op. cit.*, 37.

40) D. K. Wyatt in D. J. Steinberg ed., *In Search of Southeast Asia*. 1971. 63, and Busakorn, *op. cit.*, 240.

41) N. J. Brailey, "A Re-investigation of the Gwe of Eighteenth Century Burma," in *JSEAS* (Journal of South East Asian Studies) II. 2 (1971), 33-47.

42) Prachakitkorachak, *Phongsawadan Yonok*. 483.

taking, but perhaps Kawila had already gained the goodwill of the Chakri and his brother, who became King Rama I and *Uparat* (Deputy King) respectively in 1782, when Taksin was deposed. Certainly, the new King made no attempt to resume his predecessor's policy in the north, and turned back to a more moderate approach in his dealings with the Western Lao as appears to have been his general tendency in most fields of affairs. The Uparat took Kawila's sister to wife as his Chief Queen, and thereafter Kawila was built up into a viceroy of Western Laos, being given the responsibility to resettle Chiangmai, and after its successful establishment and defence against the last major Burmese attack in 1799, was promoted *Phrachao Prathetsarat*, or 'dependent king'.⁴³⁾ This rank placed him on a par with the rulers of Vientiane and Cambodia, and on his visits to Rama I's new capital, Bangkok, with the King's six senior ministers, the *Senabodi*.

There are ostensibly particular parallels between Chiangmai and Vientiane, which was placed under direct Siamese military rule in 1779, but where, later, Chao Anu was similarly built up into a viceroy of the North-east.⁴⁴⁾ Yet generally there appears little real consistency in Siamese policy towards its tributaries even in these years. In Cambodia and the South Taksin left things largely as they were; in Nakhon Sithammarat indeed, it was he who set about building the local governor up to viceroy status, while it was Rama I who in turn demoted the same governor, and balanced his authority with that of the rising Chinese immigrant governing family of Songkhla.⁴⁵⁾ Rama I also detached a number of western Cambodian provinces in 1795, and placed them under the separate administration of the especially trustworthy Battambang noble family, an action which probably contributed to the subsequent attempts of the King of Cambodia to revive his tributary dependence on rival Vietnam.⁴⁶⁾ Even in Eastern Laos in the 1790's, Rama I was concerned to foil Vientiane's efforts to dominate neighbouring Luang Phrabang. Chao Anu's rise dates more properly from the next reign, that of Rama II (1809–24), and follows an 1807–8 episode in Western Laos that should have thrown a great deal of doubt on the wisdom of a 'viceroy' policy.⁴⁷⁾ Burmese emissaries brought to Bangkok what they claimed was evidence of *Phrachao* Kawila's approaches to the Court of Ava to establish some sort of Burma-Chiangmai relationship. The *exposé* suggests that the negotiations fell through, and thus the Siamese would have seen no need for action. But there seems good reason to believe that the approaches were made, reflecting Lao feeling that Siamese influence was excessive or unfriendly,⁴⁸⁾ and failing perhaps because of a renewed Burmese refusal to allow Chiangmai

43) *Ibid.*, 502. King Chulalongkorn himself employed this English term to General Sir Andrew Clarke, 10th August 1877. F.O. (Foreign Office Archives) 69/67.

44) K. Wenk, *The Restoration of Siam under Rama I*. 1968. 99, and D. K. Wyatt, "Siam and Laos, 1767–1824," *JSEAH* (Journal of South-East Asian History) IV. 2. (1963), 19–47.

45) Wenk, *op. cit.*, 103.

46) Chandler in Steinberg ed., *op. cit.*, 119.

47) Wenk, *op. cit.*, 91–94.

48) The Lao envoy handed over by the Burmese specifically linked his mission with the death of Kawila's brother-in-law, the Uparat Surasih, back in 1803.

‘two-headed bird’ status. Significantly, Kawila’s successors were not permitted by the Siamese to inherit his complete pre-eminence.

So far as general Siamese tributary policy is concerned, it seems reasonable to conclude that it had become much more active than in later Ayuthya days, the primary policy-determining factors being the personality and loyalty of the respective dependent rulers, and the nature of the threats from beyond. Kawila and Anu were backed because, though ‘strong men’, they were originally regarded as unusually loyal, and because the reigns of each coincided with periods of particular danger from the North-west, i.e. Burma, and then the East, Vietnam. Similarly, a subsequent Governor of Nakhon, *Chaophraya* Noi, achieved great prominence in the peninsula once again after 1810, as Bangkok became increasingly aware of the growing British presence in the Straits of Malacca.⁴⁹⁾ He too was a man in whom the Siamese placed great trust. But when such threats diminished, or such loyalty became doubtful, Siamese backing would be withdrawn. The ultimate deterrent was employed in Vientiane following Anu’s rebellion of 1826–7. There, Bangkok felt forced finally to abolish the state, simultaneously offering a warning to any other similarly inclined dependencies. In Cambodia, exceptionally, the local rulers were never sufficiently loyal because of the counter opportunities for Vietnamese support, and thus the alternative expedient was adopted by the Siamese of creating a rival Cambodian dependency along the Western borders of the country.

The above discussion has been concerned with a period for which we have only scanty evidence, and most of this is in Siamese, and therefore Ayuthya or Bangkok-oriented. One of the advantages of concentration on the Bangkok-Chiangmai relationship is that, in the period after 1810, a comparative wealth of evidence develops, much of it in the form of reports by Western visitors of what the Lao locals thought, or claimed to think. As has been suggested above, one should beware of concepts such as the ‘typical’ tributary relationship. Western Laos during this period was seemingly the quietest and most stable of Siam’s frontier areas, and all the more emphatically so after Burma’s defeat by Britain in the war of 1824–6, although Bangkok was probably worried by the British presence and certainly continued to show apprehension of Burmese ambitions as late as the 1840’s. The government may even have been encouraged in both fears by the Lao Princes, but nevertheless conditions were undeniably at their most favourable for Siamese interests.

Miss Wilson in her thesis, referring to the 1810–50 period or the couple of decades that followed it, talks much in terms of Bangkok ‘control’ policies with regard to its tributaries. She lists a considerable number of ways in which ‘control’ was exerted; namely, the recruitment of dependent rulers’ sons as *Mahatlek*, or Royal Pages, and daughters as wives or ladies-in-waiting to the King or members of the Royal Family, appointive powers and

49) W. F. Vella, *Siam under Rama III*. 61. He of course was regarded throughout as a Siamese official rather than a dependent prince, as also even was Ahmad, Malay Sultan of Kedah (1803–50?), similarly given the ‘official’ title of *Chaophraya*. cf. Bonney, *Kedah*. 121, fn. 94.

rewards, *sakun*, or the exploitation of family rivalries, and judicial authority, all in the absence of any regular bureaucracy at this time. She scarcely bothers, indeed, to distinguish between the *prathetsarat* dependencies and the *huamuang*, or provinces of Siam Proper, for she asserts that Siamese concern being greatest regarding the border *prathetsarat*, therefore Siamese 'control' was also greatest there, and denies, in the process, the hitherto generally accepted theory that the authority of pre-modern South East Asian rulers declined in reverse proportion to the distance from the capital city.⁵⁰⁾

This approach reflects, it seems to me, the Bangkok materials it was primarily based upon. As Jacobs declares, "even at the cyclical nadir, the center's *claim* to total authority over the periphery was never relinquished."⁵¹⁾ Miss Wilson herself demonstrates the considerable degree of control the capital possessed in its immediately neighbouring rural areas.⁵²⁾ But in terms of Western Laos, even in this period, 'influence', or occasionally 'authority' would seem to be much more valid terms with which to characterize Siamese policy. The presence of relatives of the Lao Princes in Bangkok must, indeed, have been some sort of deterrent to any anti-Bangkok activity by them, but specific examples of such exiles do not appear to have been very common. We have far more cases of Lao *Chao*, or members of the local ruling elites, exiled in Bangkok at the request of a state Prince, following their defeat in some succession or other squabble. And at least one Eastern Lao rebellion rather later on was actually provoked by the removal of a Prince's sons to Bangkok.⁵³⁾

Miss Wilson similarly emphasizes the importance of Bangkok's powers of appointment and reward.⁵⁴⁾ But King Mongkut's *Phrakhleng*, or Foreign Minister, *Chaophraya* Thiphakorawong (Kham Bunnag), admitted that the succession in Western Laos was elective locally,⁵⁵⁾ and it was Mongkut himself (ruled 1851–68), apparently, who was behind the *Bangkok Recorder* article of 1866,⁵⁶⁾ which defined very clearly the limited extent of Siamese participation in the process. The Siamese kings possessed a theoretical power of veto, exercisable when the Lao Princes presented themselves, *ma fao*, for investiture in Bangkok, but there is no recorded instance of their ever doing so in this period so far as Western Laos is concerned. On the other hand, there are apparent examples of Siamese desires being overridden; for example, the succession dispute of 1855–6 at Chiangmai.⁵⁷⁾ On the whole, the Siamese Government avoided obvious commitment to any candidate if it was not already clear which had majority support locally. And it reflects a Bangkok-centricity that even the Siamese themselves rarely showed, to believe that the Lao so valued the titles and presents Bangkok showered on them that they allowed themselves to be seriously influenced with regard

50) C. Wilson, *op. cit.*, 513, 520, 701.

51) Jacobs, *op. cit.*, 57. italics added.

52) C. Wilson, *op. cit.*, 691–92.

53) Bunnag, *op. cit.*, 123.

54) Wilson, *op. cit.*, 513–9.

55) Snidvongs, *op. cit.*, 237–8.

56) 3rd May 1866.

57) *Chakri* to *Phraya* of Chiangrai, 10th November 1856. NL (Thai National Library MSS) 1218/13.

either to appointments or policy. At root, even at the turn of the century,⁵⁸⁾ the Lao considered the Siamese, or 'Thai Noi' ('Little Thai') as they called them, an inferior race individually, as much as the Siamese did the Lao.

The exploitation of family rivalries is self-evidently a devious means of 'influence' as opposed to 'control' or direction. With the senior offices in all the Western Lao states distributed amongst rival families, even though those of Chiangmai, Lampang and Lamphun were derived from a common ancestor, opportunities for such exploitation might have been expected to have been frequent. It is all the more remarkable and significant, therefore, that a tradition of Lao 'strong-men' developed, with, after a short interregnum on the death of Kawila, the successive eras of Mahawong, *Uparat*, *Phraya* and *Phrachao* at Chiangmai, 1826-56, and thereafter Kawila's son, Kawilorot, *Phraya* and *Phrachao* at Chiangmai, 1856-70. The Siamese were indeed able to prevent either from assuming quite the dominating role of Kawila right across Western Laos, but the pre-eminence of both is undeniable.⁵⁹⁾ The role of a third individual, Bunthawong, *Uparat* of Chiangmai 1870-82, was complicated by the international problems I shall be discussing below, and limited by his premature death.

Miss Wilson's case appears weakest of all in connection with the question of Siamese judicial authority in Western Laos, and the use of the *dika* and *klao thot* forms of petition. She admits herself the survival of very few Fourth Reign (Mongkut) references to petitions complaining of official behaviour, even in Siam Proper.⁶⁰⁾ Those cases she does adduce, however, seem invariably to indicate the reluctance of King or Ministers to follow them up, particularly in the more distant provinces. Of the two deriving from Western Laos, that of 1848 against the Prince of Lampang, which resulted in his replacement, merely reflected and reinforced the domination of his rival, Mahawong of Chiangmai, while that against Kawilorot in 1866 actually rebounded to the accused Prince's advantage. Here, the charge brought by several of the Prince's alienated subordinates, was the very serious one of conspiracy with the Burmese. The evidence of doubtful dealings, involving even Lao gifts of elephants to the other side, was conclusive. Seemingly, however, Kawilorot convinced the King's chief minister, *Chaophraya* Si Suriyawong (Chuang Bunnag), that he had not planned actual withdrawal of his allegiance, the King himself was overruled, the petitioners were all exiled in Bangkok, and the Prince returned home in triumph.⁶¹⁾

One other highly significant issue develops from Miss Wilson's specific denial of any great distinction between *prathetsarat* and 'outer provinces' in their relations with Bangkok. Another author, N. Jacobs, maintains that while governors of even the remotest *provinces* merely "strove to establish small-scale reproductions of this primary [Bangkok] system of patrimonial relationship rather than to legitimize formally local political rights within the

58) Vice-Consul Lyle to Black, 1st May 1900, F.O. 628/267, or to Beckett, 14th August 1902, F.O. 628/279.

59) Rev. D. McGilvary to Rev. Irving, 3rd March 1868. No. 72 in PMSL (U.S. Presbyterian Mission, Siam Letters) III.

60) Wilson, *op. cit.*, 498-503.

61) Maha Ammat, *Phongsawadan Chiangmai*, 115-6.

larger system", in the 'tributary zone', from the Siamese point of view, "it was a choice of center recognition or no political presence at all."⁶² Both authors thus seem here to dispute the conventional view of gradually reduced central authority the further from the Siamese capital. But while Wilson claims greatest Siamese authority throughout the outer provinces and dependencies equally, Jacobs seems to emphasize central authority over the outer provinces *vis-a-vis* the dependencies. Each thus begs the question of the conversion of dependencies into provinces, which undoubtedly happened in pre-modern and modernizing Siam as a measure of growing Siamese authority in the border regions, and the tying-in of their local hierarchies with the central one in Bangkok.

A case in point is that of Tak, or Raheng, on the edge of the Chaophraya plain, south of Chiangmai. Its eighteenth century allegiance must be a matter of doubt.⁶³ There seems no evidence of any actual personal connection between the future King Taksin and the town of which he was supposed to be governor in the last days of Ayuthya. A Western map printed in the 1840's shows a major earthwork running east-west to the south of the town, supposedly marking the Lao frontier with Siam Proper,⁶⁴ and there is no doubt that it was generally known by its Lao name, Raheng, and remained preponderantly Lao in population until the second half of the nineteenth century.⁶⁵ Indeed, it formed a constituent part of Kawila's viceroyalty, and continued to be ruled by chiefs of local origin for decades after his death.⁶⁶ By 1866, however, it had become the only 'outer province' the then Minister of the North was prepared to admit to in the northern part of the Chaophraya plain.⁶⁷ It still nevertheless paid tribute,⁶⁸ rather than offering allegiance through the more abject water-oath ceremony of the inner provinces, and while the latter had their officials appointed direct from Bangkok and applied standard Siamese taxes and *corvées*,

62) Jacobs, *op. cit.*, 27, 57.

63) M. Vickery ("Thai Regional Elites and the Reforms of King Chulalongkorn," *Journal of Asian Studies* XXIX, 4, 868) quotes La Loubere's *Kingdom of Siam* on the status of a late seventeenth century ruler of the town as an 'hereditary lord' and vassal to the King of Siam.

64) With D. Richardson, "Journal of a Mission from the Supreme Government of India to the Court of Siam," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, IX (1840).

65) D. McGilvary in *Bangkok Calendar*, 1868, 80, or to Rev. D. Irving, 11th June 1880, in PMSI. IV, 71.

66) Notton, *Chronique de Xiengmai*. 217, and Report of a Talien (Mon) Myothugyi, 3rd August 1831. BSP (Bengal Secret Proceedings) vol. 362.

67) *Chaophraya* Phutharaphai to Consul T. G. Knox, 15th February 1866. F.O. 628/4/56. There seems still to be much disagreement on Siamese methods of provincial and/or tributary classification. Wilson (847, Table F2) notes two parallel systems, one of four numerical classes, the other of Inner and Outer *huamuang* (towns or provinces) except in the *Mahatthai* region where, in the 1860's at least, there were Inner, Middle and Outer *huamuang*. The last numbered eight, and included Raheng, while the dependencies formed a quite separate classification.

Bunnag (31-32), following Prince Damrong, combines Miss Wilson's two systems in a sense, claiming a basic system of inner provinces, outer provinces, and dependencies, the first subdivided into the four numerical classes. Here, the outer provinces are described as a late eighteenth century, and by no means widespread innovation. Akin (69) gives an alternative combination, ascribing the numerical Fourth Class denomination to all Inner *huamuang*, and First, Second and Third to the Outer *huamuang*.
68) In money, though. Bunnag, *op. cit.*, 33.

the Minister asserted his obligation to appoint most of Tak's governors and junior officials from local families and respect local customs. By this time, the town was swelling with immigrants from all over Burma and Siam, drawn by trade opportunities and the developing teak industry. Yet there can be little doubt that the town's period of association with Western Laos, and its surviving degree of autonomy and Lao identity had a lot to do with the problems of 'control' Bangkok faced in Tak in the 1860's and 1870's, when, for a time, the officials of the town themselves enjoyed a reputation unequalled in Northern Siam for thuggery and misrule, preying on the trade that had turned it into the largest commercial centre north of Bangkok.⁶⁹⁾

Bangkok interference in Tak was, indeed, to serve warning of similar action in Western Laos and other dependencies. Thus, the question of whether it should be classified as part of the administrative modernization of Siam, or a hangover from pre-modern Siamese centralizing ambitions is quite as relevant as the classification of the intervention in Western Laos. In fact, the evidence appears too scanty to come to any firm conclusion, but it would seem something of a transitional case, its origins probably dating back before the 1850's, generally recognized as the first really critical period of modern Western pressure on Siam, but its climax not really coming till the 1880's, and the experience gained here ultimately contributing to the character of administrative centralization as applied even to Siam Proper in the years after 1892.

In the meanwhile, however, such policies were to be applied to Western Laos and other dependencies, and their situation differed in important respects from that of Tak in the mid-nineteenth century. Given that the Lao rulers were locally chosen, ran their own judicial and financial systems, and patronized a separate local monkhood, and against the background of their historic traditions of independence, it seems a more useful approach to concentrate rather on what had become customary limitations on their sovereignty. Those of a ceremonial character clearly had their importance; the delaying of the cremation of a deceased senior *Chao* until the arrival of a Siamese official representative, the use of Siamese regalia (*khruangyot*), bestowed on individual *Chao* when they presented themselves for investiture in the Siamese capital, and the practice of offering to the Siamese Kings locally discovered attributes of royalty, such as unusual animals, particularly the so-called 'white elephants'. Of greater practical significance, in terms of its effect on local Lao economies, was tribute, generally paid triennially.⁷⁰⁾ The symbolic gold and silver trees contained, in fact, a considerable weight of precious metal,⁷¹⁾ but even more burdensome, probably, were the local

69) Satow's Chiangmai Journal, 22nd February 1886. P.R.O. (British Public Record Office Archives) 30/33/20/1.

70) As part of the Chiangmai political settlement of 1856, Bangkok attempted to extort a promise of *annual* tribute, but the triennial basis seems to have been reverted to within a couple of years. *Chakri* to *Chao* of Chiangmai, 10th November 1856, and date not given, 1858/9. NL 1218/13 and 1220/37.

71) C. Bock, *Temples and Elephants*. 1884. 156, estimated the value of a gold tree in 1880 at about £135.

product requirements, mostly paid in teak-wood by the Western Lao states.⁷²⁾ All this implied a great deal more than the Chinese tributary system, and yet they were concessions, made by the Lao states as political entities quite separate from Siam, and not even in the field of foreign relations during this period did they operate as true protectorates. Bangkok specifically recognized their right to make what virtually amounted to treaties with the British Burmese authorities in respect of border demarcation and trade.⁷³⁾ And that they maintained links with Siam's old enemy, Burma, the Lao did not flaunt before even British visitors, let alone the Siamese themselves; they had no wish to endanger the 'face' of the latter, as in 1808; but that the Siamese should hear mere rumours of such did no harm at all. That the Siamese remained on tenterhooks about the loyalty of the Western Lao states, and were therefore very tentative in their treatment of them, is attested to by various Western visitors.⁷⁴⁾

Thus, having originated from the Lao point of view in a choice of two evils, of the least overbearing of two powerful neighbours, with the local growth in population, and the development of alternative trade connections with Yunnan and British Burma,⁷⁵⁾ the tributary relationship with Bangkok seems to have survived up to 1850 largely on the basis of lengthening tradition, and on the continuing reputation for non-interference of the Siamese. From the Siamese point of view, at the very least an active policy would have involved the serious communications problem, contravening the anti-annexationist Indian-derived traditions described above, and a great deal of personal inconvenience for many members of the Siamese elite. Bangkok was their world, and they had no wish for exile to distant provinces and tributaries, in their eyes barbarian lands, of little interest in themselves, which merely served to set off the magnificence of Court life and insulate it against attack from beyond. It is only during the reign of Mongkut that there are signs of more positive policies developing, more pronounced in other border areas than Western Laos perhaps, but to reach a real fruition in Western Laos in the 1870's and 1880's. Why and how, then, did Siamese policy alter from one of influence to one of direction, and the relationship from a balance of interests to one representing primarily those of Bangkok?

There can be little doubt that nearly all significant change that has occurred in Siam or Thailand since the mid-nineteenth century, has been directly or indirectly Western-provoked. This is not to deny that Thai culture and society had been developing all through the centuries, but the quality of change over the last century has been very different. Nor is this surprising, in view of the quite unprecedented threat presented by the West, and the long and general South East Asian tradition of absorbing influences from outside rather

72) Usually despatched every year or two—some 250 trees back in the 1830's according to the Journal of Captain McLeod, *Parliamentary Accounts and Papers*, C, vol. 50 (1867). 38–9.

73) *Chakri* to *Phraya* of Chiengmai, 22nd September 1845. NL 1207/45, and Commr. Colvin to Bushby, 19th July 1847. India Secret Proceedings, vol. 138.

74) Henry Burney in the *Burney Papers* I, pt. 1, 83–4; Journal of Captain McLeod, 33, M. Grandjean in *Chinese Repository* XVI, 335–346, and Journals of Dr. Richardson (British Museum MS. 30354), f. 152–3.

75) Both prompted apparently by Lao initiatives in the 1820's—cf. Journal of Captain McLeod, 32 and fn., and Journals of Dr. Richardson, f. 3.

then propagating abroad local innovations. And in determining whether Siamese policies of administrative centralization were modern or pre-modern, what is important is not necessarily simply the outward forms they took; the Japanese 'Meiji Restoration' misnomer is surely evidence enough of that; but the reasons for them, so far as they can be assessed in particular cases. So far as the Western Laos case is concerned, the West, and principally Britain was clearly at the bottom of it all.

The story of the extension of British interest to mainland South East Asia is perhaps well enough known, and only its specific relevance for Thailand will be discussed here. It first became evident in territorial terms as early as 1786, when the East India Company purchased the island of Penang from the Sultan of Kedah. At that time, the newly established Chakri dynasty's authority over the North Malay dependencies was weak and threatened by Burma, and it was not until 1818, when Bangkok required Kedah to invade and subject its southern neighbour, Perak, to Siamese suzerainty, that this Siamese expansionism caused Anglo-Siamese relations to become an issue. When, in 1821, supposedly suspecting Burmese intrigue in the area, the Siamese sent forces into Kedah to seize the Sultan, the British on Penang, to whom the Sultan fled for refuge, recommended opening direct negotiations with Bangkok. In response, the Government of India despatched John Crawfurd to the Siamese capital where, although he failed to persuade the Siamese to compromise with their erstwhile dependent, or open up their country to trade with the West, he probably helped to make them as aware of Western strength as he did the East India Company of the weakness of Siam.⁷⁶⁾

Yet fortunately, while the Crawfurd mission stimulated a mild interest in the possibilities of trade with Siam among the business communities of the Straits Settlements (now including Singapore and Malacca along with Penang), the political interests of the two governments now became paramount and coincident. From the time Burmese activities on the Bengal frontier first forced the reluctant British Indian Government into war with Ava in 1824, until the 1870's, it was Calcutta's apparent policy to avoid further complications with Bangkok. The principal purpose of the despatch of the second British envoy to Siam, Captain Henry Burney in 1825, was to ensure Siamese neutrality during the First Anglo-Burmese War, and Burney even tried to obtain Siamese aid against Burma in return for the cession of the Burmese province of Tenasserim. The Siamese, probably not yet convinced that the British were in South East Asia to stay, exhibited a cautious determination to remain neutral, and proved willing to accept only a very ambiguous division of interests in Northern Malaya and a very limited trade agreement. The only aspect of Anglo-Siamese relations which seemingly concerned Calcutta seriously during the next two decades, was the cattle and teak trade between Siam's Western Lao dependencies and the port of Moulmein, on which the solvency of the province of Tenasserim, annexed to the Indian Empire in 1826, largely depended. In this field, significantly, the Indian Government discovered that Bangkok had little influence, when a temporary intermission in the trade prompted the sending to

76) Vella, *Siam under Rama III*. 63, 115-7.

Bangkok of a third British emissary, Dr. Richardson, in 1839.⁷⁷⁾

Simultaneously, it was becoming evident to the Siamese that the East India Company was not prepared to support the commercial interests of the Straits Settlements with force, and they began quietly to ignore the Burney trade agreement provisions. Led by the King himself, Rama III, many of the senior officials carried on the traditions of their Chinese, Indian, or Persian merchant forbears, by extending their own trading activities to the British colonies of Singapore and (from 1840) Hong Kong, and the Chinese coastal ports. In the process, a considerable realignment of power within the Siamese kingdom took place, with the emphasis switching from the interior to the coastal provinces. No longer did the comparatively vast but not easily wielded manpower owing loyalty to successive holders of the post of *Chakri*, or Minister of the North, count for so much. The officials with interests in the formerly more thinly-populated coastal provinces now⁷⁸⁾ commanded the most lucrative sources of income and the more elaborate mini-bureaucracies to administer them, and one family in particular, the Bunnags, seems practically to have scooped this new pool of influence to become dominant in Siamese politics. One member of the family, Dit, controlled simultaneously from 1830–51, both the Ministries most concerned with the outside world, the *Kalahom* and the *Phrakhlang*.⁷⁹⁾ Thus, it was his relatives and supporters, the latter including both Mongkut and Itsaret, the next King and Second King-to-be, who became most knowledgeable about the West, and best qualified to deal practically and realistically with the problems it was about to present to Siam.

The most significant characteristic of the new Western, still mainly British initiative, when it came in the early 1850's, was that it was prompted by the now preponderant, London-backed private commercial interests in face of strong opposition from the Indian subcontinent-oriented East India Company. Thus, even in the aftermath of the Second Anglo-Burmese War (1852–3) and the resulting extension of the Anglo-Siamese frontier, its effect, through the treaty arranged by Sir John Bowring on Britain's behalf in 1855, was rather to break the remarkable monopolistic control of the Siamese elite over the country's foreign trade, but hardly to touch territorial questions or political matters. It did not result in any very remarkable increase in the Western presence, while the abolition of the East India Company in 1857, and the establishment of the India Office in its place, apparently restored the influence of specifically Indian interests in Home Government counsels. As long as Anglo-Siamese trade expanded steadily, as it was to do in the years after 1855, very little British pressure

77) *Ibid.*, 117–121, Richardson's 1839 Journal in ISP vol. 26, and Commr. Blundell to Bushby, 20th October 1842. ISP vol. 87.

78) To some extent this was perhaps a renewal of the seventeenth century situation, the pre-exclusion era of commercial activity.

79) These were two of the six *Senabodi*-headed 'ministries', responsible respectively for War and the Treasury according to the Palatine Law. The *Kalahom*, in practice, was more specifically the Ministry for the Southern Provinces, while the *Phrakhlang* administered those around the capital and the Bight of Bangkok. The *Mahatthai*, Ministry of the North, was the third of the so-called 'omnibus' ministries.

was to be exerted on the Siamese in other fields.⁸⁰⁾

In fact, there can be no question that the first clear challenge to Siam's territorial integrity, and thus her existing unbureaucratic governmental system, came from France. Their late seventeenth century escapade aimed at the take-over of the government of the country, and not forgotten by the Siamese, gave the French a special sentimental interest in Siam. However, their initial nineteenth century activity was concentrated further east. Fifteen months before they obtained the cession of their first three Vietnamese provinces in mid-1862, they had begun to make overtures to the King of Cambodia whose country was prostrated by civil war. The apprehensive Siamese refrained from any overt action in support of their own claims, and within three years, the French had converted the rival Vietnamese claim into effective control in their own name. Later, in 1867, fearful of the spread of French interest to Eastern Laos, King Mongkut agreed to abandon all Siamese rights over Cambodia in return for the cession of two Cambodian provinces. This battle was thus lost long before the Siamese could devise any real administrative innovation to strengthen their suzerainty, and nor was any to stem directly from this loss.⁸¹⁾

Elsewhere, according to Mongkut himself, French interests were secretly involved in the Kra isthmus canal scheme during the early 1860's,⁸²⁾ while in 1865, three Frenchmen suddenly requested passes to buy timber in Northern Siam.⁸³⁾ The Lagrée-Garnier expedition up the Makhong valley in 1866-7 proved the poor navigational value of that waterway, but other French agents penetrated the Shan States from Upper Burma in the early 1870's,⁸⁴⁾ and in 1873-4, Garnier's ill-fated attempt to occupy Hanoi was exploited by the French colonial authorities to establish a permanent presence in independent Vietnam, not so far from Siam's Eastern Lao dependencies. Even King Mongkut's trip to view the solar eclipse at Hua Whan in 1868, where he caught his fatal illness, was apparently mainly prompted by the fear that a French party which had previously requested permission to do the same, independently, would then establish itself permanently on the peninsula.⁸⁵⁾

Of course, if the French seemed to be everywhere, British commercial interests were not idle during this period either, around Siam's vulnerable periphery. For a time, trade with Cambodia aroused their enthusiasm, as did also the Kra scheme. During the 1860's, British officials in Burma again questioned Siamese suzerainty over Western Laos,⁸⁶⁾ while, in 1862, Governor Cavenagh of Singapore sent warships to bombard Trengganu on the east coast of the Malay Peninsula to prevent the entrenchment of Siamese authority in the area.

80) J. C. Ingram, *Economic Change in Thailand since 1850*. 1955 esp. 33-5, and Brailey, *Origins of the Siamese Forward Movement...* 90-95.

81) P. Duke, *Les Relations entre la France et la Thaïlande*. Bangkok, 1962. Chapters I-II.

82) Mongkut to Knox, 23rd December 1866. F.O. 69/40.

83) *Phraya* Maha Ammat circular, 26th July 1865. NL 1227/92.

84) British Resident, Mandalay, to Secretary Duncan, 10th October 1874. *IFP* (India Foreign and Political), vol. 773.

85) Acting Consul Alabaster to Lt. Col. Ryan. 16th June 1868 in F.O. 628/5/66.

86) Moulmein Commr. Fytche to Chief Commr. Phayre, 3rd September 1863, *IFP*. vol. 71.

Yet, in the late 1860's, Governor Ord publicly reversed his predecessor's policy, while the British Consulate in Bangkok apparently connived at Siamese exclusion of British commercial interests from the Lao dependencies.⁸⁷⁾ The prime difference between France and England lay probably in the fact that, while the governments of both countries were generally averse to the imperial adventures urged on them by their local representatives and commercial and other interests, French governments lacked the authority of their British counterparts, were thus often involved involuntarily in such adventures, and rendered incapable of extricating themselves except at the expense of much prestige. There was not the same separation of personnel as between the British Foreign Service and Indian Political Branch, various French diplomats in Bangkok being recruited from, or subsequently joining their Colonial Service. And they were also, earlier, more conscious of their 'mission civilisatrice'. Thus, it was undoubtedly they the Siamese initially feared most. King Mongkut perhaps truly believed that Britain was conniving at French expansion when he wrote to his Consul in Rangoon in 1865,

I beg to know from your information of fact how far or how extensive the French influence on this powerless land of Cochin China, Cambodia, Laos and Siam was, or has been agreed by her European alliance.

British nation here—[Is?] Her Majesty's Government pleased to have French colony connected with province of Tenasserim of British Burmah.⁸⁸⁾
and later to the British Consul in Bangkok, Thomas Knox,

I am of opinion that we are very powerless and orphans when the French do such indirect steps toward us without shame. We cannot resist or defend ourselves unless another power would favour us by reasonable merciful assistance...

I beg to say unto you myself alone without the knowledge of our Government that if now any professing of being under the kind protectorate of Her Britannic Majesty be necessary, I will fully subscribe myself and my family to be so. Why have I said so? To cause you to be glad? O! No! I say truly Her Britannic Majesty's ancestors were in Royalty before mine several years and her royal generations continued peacefull for the last many years without change. Which the grand Napoleon Buonaparte has claimed his sovereignty 14 years after my grandfather and revolutions took place in France subsequently. I cannot be glad to take refuge or devote myself to the French like the King of Cambodia without shame.

How should I have any piece of ground of suitable climate in British territories at either British Burmah or Pinang or Ceylon to be purchased for building, cultivation &c. like a piece of ground in England purchased by the old French King Louis Philippe late in his reign? I wish this for my residence in very old age or for my feeble successors in future, if this land or region of Chin India beyond British Burmah were allowed for influences to be made a vast colony of Her Britannic Majesty's powerful Ally.⁸⁹⁾

87) C. D. Cowan, *Nineteenth Century Malaya*. 1961. 16-17, 62, and Brailey, *op. cit.*, 155. No further teak forest leases were issued to Westerners after the crisis of the mid-1860's until the 1880's.

88) Mongkut to Consul Fowle, 25th April 1865. *IPF*, vol. 78. A similar suggestion appears in Wilson *op. cit.*, 391-2, Si Suriyawong to D. K. Mason, 6th February 1865.

Thus, rather than accept French dismemberment of his country, or, presumably, attempt any significant governmental reorganization, King Mongkut was prepared to consider a British protectorate. Fortunately for him, the extreme French pressure that prompted these letters ended soon after with the absolute cession of Cambodia, for the reaction of British officials, both in London and Bangkok, was to dismiss the idea out of hand.⁹⁰⁾

Nevertheless, the period since 1850, during which active British policy towards Siam had been determined largely by the needs of the rather limited British commercial interests trading with Bangkok, was about to end, and the Siamese were to be presented with new British challenges.

In 1870, the Indian Government suddenly became seriously concerned about a dramatic slump in the teak trade upon which the prosperity of the port of Moulmein depended. This was caused by disorder in the Salween valley. But influenced also, perhaps, by the sort of French activity mentioned above, and by a renewed interest in overland trade with China, it abandoned at last its policy of non-interference east of Burma, despatched an officer to Chiangmai, and even entertained plans for the recognition of Chiangmai's independence, or alternatively, the replacement of Foreign Office representatives in Bangkok by members of its own Political Service.⁹¹⁾ Very soon after, in 1873, the Colonial Office in London sent Sir Andrew Clarke to Singapore, and within a couple of years, saw its energetic new Governor initiate the 'Resident' system in three of the Malay States, and effectively extend the mantle of British paramountcy over most of the rest. With regard to the neighbouring Siamese dependencies, British Indian and Malayan officials were motivated primarily by a desire to see peace on their common borders and the unrestricted expansion of trade,⁹²⁾ and neither then, nor during the rest of the century, does any suggestion seem to have been articulated in official circles of British annexation of Siam as a whole, or indeed of Western Laos. Siam's authority over its Malay dependencies was sometimes disputed, and territorial accessions were expected in this area if the French continued to encroach in the east. But most importantly, the Siamese did enjoy throughout in their efforts of preserve their independence and territorial integrity, the crucial support of the British Foreign Office, which recognized the value of Siam in the world context as a bufferstate, provided that its rulers displayed a realistic adaptability in response to more moderate Western demands. Thus, the Siamese still had a breathing-space through from 1867 until, in 1885, following their annexation of the rest of Vietnam, the French renewed their pressure, presenting to the British Government a proposal for the division of Siam into two spheres of influence.⁹³⁾ (To be continued)

89) Mongkut to Consul Knox, 18th December 1866. F.O. 69/40. See also A. L. Moffat, *Mongkut, the King of Siam*. 1961, 118-119.

90) Knox to Lord Stanley, 25th December 1866. F.O. 69/40.

91) Chief Commr. Fytche's Secretary Wheeler to Indian Government Secretary Aitchison, 16th July 1870, and Aitchison to Fytche, December 1870. F.O. 69/53. 5

92) E. Thio, *British Policy in the Malay Peninsula, 1880-1910*. 1969. Vol. I, Introduction. The idea of political expansion up the peninsula was specifically rejected by Colonial Office officials in December 1886. cf. P. Loh, *The Malay States, 1877-95*. 1971. 65.

93) Apparently around September 1885, but later expanded. cf. *IPSHC* (India Political and Secret Home Correspondence), vol. 94, p. 1677.